

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4486, MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015; AND PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4487, LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015

SPEECH OF

**HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, April 30, 2014*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the Rule for H.R. 4486, the "Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2015," which supports our military and their families and provides the benefits and medical care that our veterans have earned for their service.

H.R. 4486 provides the facilities and infrastructure needed to house, train, and equip our military personnel to defend this Nation, both in the United States and abroad, provides the housing and military community infrastructure that supports a good quality of life for them and their families, and allows the military to maintain an efficient and effective base structure.

The bill also funds programs to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits and medical care that they have earned as a result of their sacrifices in the service to our Nation.

Just as our military pledges to leave no one behind on the battlefield, Democrats in Congress have pledged to leave no veteran behind when they come home.

The bill provides a total of \$165 billion in FY 2015 to fund military construction projects and programs of the Veterans Affairs Department, an increase of \$7 billion (4%) over current funding levels. This total includes \$93.5 billion in mandatory spending for VA benefits and \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding.

The bill provides a total of \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the VA in FY 2015, a 2% increase over current funding and I am pleased that it increases mandatory funding for veterans' compensation and benefits by almost 10 percent.

Mr. Speaker, although there is much in this bill that I support, I wish to note two major concerns.

First, I disagree with the funding level for VA Medical Care in the bill, which is \$368 million below the President's request and the amount I support. This underfunding for VA Medical Care could delay the timely delivery of health care services to veterans and impede our efforts to end veterans' homelessness in 2015.

Second, the bill provides \$50 million less than the President's request for Information Technology operations and maintenance programs. The result is likely to be a delay in making the necessary improvements to technology infrastructure that ensure continuity of operations for services that support all of VA's services and benefit delivery.

Third, I do not support section 411 of the bill, which would prohibit the use of funds to construct, renovate, or expand any facility in the United States to house individuals held in the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. I do not support this rider because it unduly con-

strains the flexibility that the our Armed Forces and counterterrorism professionals need to best protect U.S. national security.

Mr. Speaker, the VA serves nearly 48.5 million people: 22 million veterans and 26.5 million family members of living veterans or survivors of deceased veterans, so in my remaining time let me highlight some of the positive aspects of the bill:

\$1.2 billion for family and military personnel housing—equal to the administration's request;

The bill contains an advance appropriation for FY 2016 of \$58.7 billion, continuing the trend started in the Democratic-led 111th Congress of providing advance appropriations to the VA for the medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities accounts.

This is a significant benefit to the veterans served by the VA at the 152 hospitals, 107 domiciliary residential rehabilitation treatment programs, 133 nursing homes, 300 Vet Centers, 70 mobile Vet Centers and 821 outpatient clinics, which include independent, satellite, community-based and rural outreach clinics.

\$589 million is provided for medical, rehabilitative, health services and prosthetic research—\$3.3 million above current levels and recommends that a proportionate amount of funding for prosthetics should be focused on prosthetics for females, who outnumber male amputees by 3 percent.

In addition to veterans medical benefits, the bill provides \$93.7 billion, an increase of \$8.84 billion, in mandatory funding for other veterans benefits—primarily veterans compensation and pensions, and readjustment benefits.

\$78.7 billion for veterans service-connected compensation benefits and pensions, an increase of \$7.2 billion (10%) over current funding levels.

These funds are used for service-connected compensation payments to an estimated 4.6 million veterans, survivors and dependents and pension payments to 519,000 veterans and survivors.

\$14.8 billion for veterans readjustment benefits, an increase of \$1.6 billion (12%) over current funding levels. These funds include education and training assistance to veterans and service personnel; vocational rehabilitation; special housing and transportation grants to certain disabled veterans; and educational assistance to eligible dependents of deceased and seriously disabled veterans, as well as dependents of servicemembers who were captured or are missing in action.

This is not a perfect bill but this piece of legislation addresses the most critical needs of our service members, military families, and veterans.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE  
EDELSTEIN FAMILY

**HON. FILEMON VELA**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 1, 2014*

Mr. VELA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Edelstein family and their contributions to the Brownsville community.

In 1906, Lithuanian Immigrant Morris Edelstein opened Edelstein's Best Furniture

store in Brownsville, Texas. By the 1930s, Mr. Edelstein had expanded his furniture business to include 12 stores throughout the Rio Grande Valley. In the 1940s, Morris Edelstein's sons, Ruben and Ben, took over the family furniture business. Together, they operated the chain of stores for more than 60 years and would grow the company to employ 260 people.

Morris Edelstein taught his children the importance of giving back to the Brownsville community. Ruben started the first United Way in Brownsville, served as mayor of Brownsville, and was the first director of the Brownsville Public Utilities Board. Additionally, he worked with Washington policymakers to secure funds to build the Brownsville Community Health Center.

In 2008, the Edelstein family sold its 12 Edelstein's stores but retained two Designer's Showroom stores, managed by Ruben Edelstein's daughter, Julie Edelstein-Best. This summer, Ms. Edelstein-Best will be closing the two remaining stores due to changing market conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to honor the Edelstein family and their commitment to Brownsville for more than 100 years.

CONGRATULATING THE HONOREES  
OF THE MAINE SPORTS HALL OF  
FAME'S 39TH ANNUAL INDUC-  
TION BANQUET AND SCHOLAR-  
ATHLETE AWARDS CEREMONY

**HON. MICHAEL H. MICHAUD**

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 1, 2014*

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the honorees of the Maine Sports Hall of Fame's Annual Induction Banquet and Scholar-Athlete Awards Ceremony.

This Sunday, the Maine Sports Hall of Fame will honor Maine athletes and sports figures who have exemplified a tireless commitment to their sport and to their community. Recognition awards and scholarships also will be presented to five of Maine's outstanding high school scholar-athletes. Each of the honorees have distinguished themselves on and off the field and are most deserving of this recognition.

This year's inductees to the Maine Sports Hall of Fame are: Julia Faith Dawson Clukey, Augusta; Jack W. Cosgrove, Bangor; Joseph L. Ferris, Brewer; Edward J. Flaherty, Portland; William (Bill) Green, Cumberland; Eleanor D. Logan, Boothbay Harbor; George J. Mitchell, New York City; Steven M. Pound, Greenville; and Abigail L. (Abby) Spector, Waterville.

This year's scholar-athlete honorees are: Carsyn Koch, Washburn District High School; Ian Lee, Madawaska High School; Alexandra Logan, Cheverus High School, Portland; Mikayla Turner, Messalonskee High School, Oakland; and Rayne Whitten, Massabesic High School, Waterboro.

The President's Award is presented to "an individual who has bettered sports and athletics and has become a leader at state and national levels." This year's recipient is William E. Hagggett of West Bath.

Each of these honorees is among the best that Maine has to offer. Through their leadership and their incredible commitment to their